



How God Uses Wives
to Shape the Souls
of Their Husbands

SACRED INFLUENCE

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STUDY GUIDE

A Study Guide for Sacred Influence

by Gary Thomas

The following sets of questions are meant to aid individuals, couples, and small groups in understanding and applying the ideas of Sacred Marriage. The first set of questions is intended for use by individuals or couples. It's probably best to write out answers to them individually. Couples can then talk about any of the questions they find beneficial. The questions for small groups can complement the first questions or stand alone. Usually the first small group question invites couples to get better acquainted. The second question often asks for a general impression about the topic of the day. The last question draws some sort of conclusion from the discussion. Feel free to use any of the questions for individuals to supplement small group questions.

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Chapter One

The Glory of a Godly Woman

- 1) Many women have a tendency to define themselves according to their acceptance by men. Has this ever been an issue for you?

- 2) What is the difference between trying to change a man and trying to influence him?

- 3) Do you think it's true that women tend to be more invested in their marriages than men? If so, why do you think this is? What are the challenges of such a reality?

- 4) If you "caught" your husband bragging about you, what do you think he would be saying? What would you like to hear him say in the future? Is there anything you can start doing to build on this?

- 5) On a scale of one to ten, one being, "I feel best about myself when men like me and pay attention to me," and ten being, "I believe I'm worthy because I'm made in the image of God and am loved by God," where would you fall? What can women do—for themselves and to encourage other women—to move up that scale?

- 6) How does your image of yourself as a woman compare with the Scriptures Gary shared in this chapter? What was different?

- 7) What are the marks of a woman who has turned her marriage into idolatry? How would doing this undercut a woman's power to positively influence her husband in a godly way?

Chapter Two

The Strength of a Godly Woman

1) Have you ever encountered “functional fixedness” in your own marriage? What did it look like? What didn’t work as you tried to address it? Based on what Gary shared, what do you think might be a more effective approach in the future?

2) What do you think represents the greater danger to a marriage—a husband’s momentary anger, or the wife’s perceived weakness? If you chose the latter, why do you think women often suppress their frustration instead of addressing it?

3) What is an appropriate way for a woman who is committed to a biblical view of marriage—“till death do us part”—to stand up and say, “If this doesn’t change, our relationship will be affected?” What are the dangers of such an exchange? What might be some of the benefits, for the wife as well as for the husband?

4) Do you agree with Gary that “The most damaging thing you can do in an unhealthy relationship is nothing”? What keeps some women from acting boldly? What will help them act more courageously?

5) Have you ever “given up” on an issue in your marriage? In what way? What do you wish you would have done differently, in hindsight? How might this experience affect your future actions?

6) In what area of your marriage is it most difficult for you to be active and to show courage? How can women encourage each other to be less passive and more active in their marriages?

7) List the top two areas of your marriage that need positive, God-honoring influencing. Begin praying for God to show you an appropriate, active, love-affirming response.

Chapter Three

Be Worthy of Me

- 1) If it's true that your husband's faults might be God's tools to transform you, what do you think He's trying to work on in your life today?

- 2) Why is it important for wives to maintain a healthy, biblical attitude of "becoming worthy" while seeking to influence their husbands' growth?

- 3) How is God using your marriage—as it is right now—to teach you how to love?

- 4) How has being married to an imperfect man made you stronger and wiser?

- 5) What is the difference between "dreaming" things for your husband and demanding that he change?

- 6) How does the notion that God is with you in your marriage help you face your current marital frustrations and struggles?

- 7) How do you think actively and courageously addressing the issues in your marriage will prepare you to help influence the world?

Chapter Four

The Widow of Zarepath

- 1) List the three main positive traits that first attracted you to your husband. When was the last time you complimented your husband for these traits?

- 2) If your husband were to die, apart from his companionship, what two or three things would you miss most? How can you affirm these qualities now?

- 3) Does James 3:2: “We all stumble in many ways” help you look at your husband—and your marriage—in a new light? How so?

- 4) What kind of expression is usually on your face when your husband returns home? What are some realistic expectations as to how you can consistently greet him in an edifying and influence-producing way? What can you do to stay sensitive to this long term?

- 5) How would your husband’s friends describe the way you look at your husband? Does this need to change? How so?

- 6) Where is your man most likely to fail, character-wise? How can you—following Becky Allender’s example—call your husband to his best with affirmation while still saying “no” to the sin?

Chapter Five

The Zarepath Legacy

- 1) What is at least one redeeming quality about your husband that provides a possible avenue for sacred influence?

- 2) What practical things can wives do to apply Philippians 4:8 to their husbands? “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

- 3) Do you define your husband more by his bad days than by his good ones? How can women develop realistic expectations—accepting the fact that their husbands will have off days—while still working toward positively influencing their husbands?

- 4) What wounds did your husband bring into your marriage? How would you rate your current attitude toward these wounds: redemptively nurturing, or critically judgmental? How can a woman grow in this area?

- 5) Are you ever guilty of assuming that your husband somehow just knows what you want? In what area do you need to be more direct in asking for his help or support?

- 6) Take some time to honestly survey the grace God has shown to you: think of all the impure thoughts, ugly attitudes, and immoral acts for which God has forgiven you. After pondering God’s mercy, ask yourself this: How can I practically offer the same grace to my husband that God has shown to me?

7) What percentage of your needs have you been asking your husband to meet? Do you think you have been asking of marriage more than God designed it to give? If so, in what way? Do you think you need to apologize to your husband in this regard?

8) What relational and spiritual needs do you have that aren't being met in your marriage but that could be met by cultivating other friendships at church? Do you see this as a compromise, settling for second best, or as a healthy benefit of Christian community? Other than making sure these are same-sex friendships, what are some basic guidelines for forming these relationships?

9) If, during your engagement, someone had asked your husband how pleased you were with him on a scale of one to ten, what do you think he would have said? What do you think he would say if someone were to ask him that question now? What's changed?

10) Does your husband receive more affirmation outside the home, or inside the home? What are some practical things you can do to correct this (or keep it going in the right direction)?

The Helper

1) Think of a time when your husband was feeling discouraged or vulnerable. How did you react? Do you think there was something else you should have said or done?

2) What are at least three things older women should teach younger women (according to Titus 2:3-4) about how to love or help their husbands?

3) Discuss Gary's comment, "Your husband won't hear you if he doesn't feel as though you support him." Have you found this to be true? How can wives be supportive of their husbands while also disagreeing with them?

4) What might be the spiritual benefits of a woman understanding and applying her God-ordained role in marriage?

5) List three things you can start doing that would really help your husband physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

6) How might helping your husband pave the way for you to influence your husband?

7) What two or three changes can you make in your life to help you become a better helper?

Chapter Seven

A Claim, a Call, and a Commitment

1) If it's true that Titus 2:4 could mean older women need to "wise up" younger women regarding their responsibilities as wives, what are some of the most commonly needed aspects of this "wising up?"

2) Gary argues that "families crumble because we've lost our respect for responsibility." In what ways do you see this happening?

3) Do most women today value the thought of becoming ever more responsible? What do wives tend to value most?

4) What is most difficult about acting responsibly in the face of your husband's irresponsibility? What counsel did you gain from this chapter that will help you respond appropriately?

5) Is there any way in which your attitudes, words, or actions are tempting your husband to act even more irresponsibly than he would have otherwise? What might be a more profitable alternative approach for you to consider or pursue?

6) How can women encourage other women who are patiently laying down the groundwork for long-term change in their husbands' lives? How can a wife's impatience hinder her husband's long-term character development?

7) What positive trait can you develop in response to one of your husband's weaknesses? (For example, making home a more pleasant place to be for a husband who goes out too frequently.)

8) In what area do you most need to grow in order to become a more responsible wife?

Chapter Eight

Understanding the Male Mind

- 1) Which one of the mentioned “brain differences” between genders surprised you—or enlightened you—the most? Why?
- 2) In what ways has not understanding the male mind helped to create conflict in your marriage?
- 3) Are there any ways in which you’ve expected your husband to act more like a woman than a man? Do you ever resent your husband’s male pattern of thinking? In what way? What would be a healthier response?
- 4) How can future conversations and emotionally-charged discussions take into account that some men may take up to seven hours longer than their wives to process complex emotional data?
- 5) Does your husband ever “stonewall”? If so, have you contributed to this response by “flooding” him? What advice would you give to a woman who notices stonewalling in her marriage?
- 6) Given that talking through difficulties tends to soothe the wife, but be neurologically painful for the husband, how can couples find a healthy balance?
- 7) Is there any way in which you might be “crowding” your husband emotionally? What do you need to change in this regard?
- 8) Do you need to act like Jesus and encourage your husband to experience something fun or relaxing? What would most meet your husband’s needs in this regard?
- 9) Is there any trait in your husband that isn’t sinful but that really annoys you? What’s the healthiest and most God-honoring response to such a situation?

Chapter Nine

Jeanne-Antoinette: The Power of a Persistent Pursuit

- 1) Spend some time “studying” your husband. What would make his life more comfortable, enjoyable, fulfilling, and profitable?
- 2) Do you put less effort into trying to please your husband now than you did when you were dating? What are some realistic expectations in this regard for a married woman with her own vocation and/or with children at home?
- 3) Have you started “coasting,” taking physical intimacy for granted, not putting much thought into being a generous and creative lover? What one or two things can you do to turn this around?
- 4) If your marriage was a garden, would it look neglected and full of weeds, or would it be well-maintained and healthy? What two things can you do over the next six months to begin growing a healthier marriage?
- 5) What is the most effective way for you to “captivate” your husband? When is the last time you did that?
- 6) List three ways that phileo—friendship love—can bind a man’s heart to his wife, in ways that eros love can’t.
- 7) Has your love for your husband been marked more by a persistent pursuit or a scattered effort? What can you do to remain more persistent in your efforts? How can reverence for Christ recharge a woman’s motivation?
- 8) How might persistently loving your husband and building him up positively affect your own life in the long run?

Chapter Ten

Ray and Jo: Taming the Temper, Pt. 1

- 1) Did you notice any increase in the level of your husband's anger after the two of you were married? Did this surprise you? Looking back, can you see any "seeds" of that anger now?

- 2) Why do women sometimes blame themselves for their husband's anger?

- 3) Jo discovered that since Ray was raised in an alcoholic family that she "needed to tutor him on how to talk to a woman." Discuss effective ways you've found to teach your husband how to express his anger in appropriate ways.

- 4) Gary writes that "Jo went to God, understood her value as his daughter, and approached Ray from a position of being spiritually loved instead of desperately empty." Have you ever approached your husband out of need instead of out of being loved by God? Talk about the difference it makes when wives first cultivate a satisfying relationship with God before they seek to influence their husbands.

- 5) Gary shares that "angry men sometimes tell me something they rarely tell their wives: they feel ashamed of how they've acted... In most cases, when you help your husband tame his temper, you're helping him to become the kind of man he wants to be." How might this insight help motivate you to finally take a stand—or to persevere if your stand isn't immediately met with gratitude?

6) Have you, like Jo, ever held back from sharing your needs out of fear of seeming selfish? Do you agree with Gary that patiently teaching your husband to love you is providing your husband with a valuable spiritual service?

7) How might being motivated by your husband's spiritual welfare—rather than your own comfort—transform the things you address with your husband, and the way that you address them?

8) Why do you think so many women provide indirect clues or hints about their needs, but rarely state them in a concrete manner? Why do you think it was so difficult for Jo to just tell Ray that going shopping wasn't just about buying something, but even more about being together?

Chapter Eleven

Taming the Temper, pt. 2

1) How difficult is it for you to accept Gary's charge that "at times, you must allow your husband to feel legitimately angry with you?" Do you believe anger can be an appropriate response to your sin?

2) Were you surprised that talking about a problem can soothe you, but actually increase your husband's stress? What are some ways you can give your husband "space" as he processes his anger?

3) How can you show respect—verbally and nonverbally—as a strategy to mitigate your husband's anger? Discuss how some women act or speak disrespectfully in such a way that they inadvertently create a "frustration bomb."

4) Gary writes, "For years, men have been told to be more sensitive to women; perhaps it's time to help women understand how to become more sensitive to men." Talk about some of the ways you need to be more sensitive toward your husband—particularly as it relates to respect.

5) In light of Elton Trueblood's comment that "there are a hundred ways to miss a target, but only one way to hit it," how can you maintain an attitude of humility while disagreeing with your husband? How might remembering that just because he's wrong doesn't guarantee that you are right affect the way you talk through an issue?

6) How can the church do a better job of helping women in physically abusive relationships?

Chapter Twelve

Rich and Pat: The Magic Question

- 1) Gary notes that men have a tendency to avoid battles they can't win or that make them feel incompetent. How can wives support their husbands so that they'll feel just as competent at home as they do at work?

- 2) Pat confesses that when Rich came home, "I greeted him with a list, was in a chronically bad mood, and was usually either depressed or angry." What are some realistic expectations for wives to do better than this?

- 3) Discuss the "magic question": "What things would you like me to do that I'm not doing?" Are you comfortable asking this of your husband? Why or why not?

- 4) Pat entered Rich's world of fishing even though she initially had no natural interest in it. What are some of your husband's favorite hobbies or activities, and how can you build intimacy by joining in with him?

- 5) Pat says, "God gives you your spouse as the person who can fix those things in you that you really don't want to fix." This might be a hard lesson to accept, but what are the one or two things God is using your husband to "fix" in your own life?

- 6) How can small groups in particular, or churches in general, help challenge "under-involved" husbands?

Chapter Thirteen

The Biology of a Busy Man

- 1) Was there a “romance adjustment” after your honeymoon, in which your husband started focusing more on his vocation and less on you? How did you handle it?

- 2) How can women resist becoming disappointed in their husbands and instead work to become part of an “indissoluble team,” like Lionel and Charlotte?

- 3) Michael Gurian asserts that “there is a biological tendency in men to seek self-worth through personal, independent performance,” while women tend to achieve a greater sense of self-worth through relationship. How can understanding these biological tendencies encourage a couple to work together and complement each other? Are you willing to allow your husband the same zeal to pursue performance as you pursue intimacy?

- 4) Gary warns about the tendency for women to seek a quest-oriented man, and then try to turn him into a “sedate shepherd” after the wedding. What advice would you give a young bride facing this temptation?

- 5) Do you agree that the psychological cost of a frustrating job debilitates and discourages men? If so, how can women support husbands facing such a situation?

- 6) Gary talks about “the gift of laughter.” Can women who aren’t naturally enthusiastic still offer this? If so, how?

- 7) Discuss with the group (or with God or a close friend) what you think it’s like for your husband to be married to you.

Chapter Fourteen

Pure Passion

- 1) What do you think of Gary's suggestion that "sex represents one of the most effective ways by which you can care for—and motivate—your husband"?

- 2) Do you believe it's true that, in one sense, husbands experience sex more personally than do wives? How might this affect the relational dynamics in the bedroom?

- 3) Does Michael Gurian's assertion that a man's "self-worth is linked to a great extent, to how often and how well he engages in the sex act," surprise you? How does it affect the way you might look at your husband's advances in the future?

- 4) Gary suggests that a sexually fulfilled husband "is far more likely to be more heavily involved and invested in the home," and that by making an effort at physical intimacy, wives "open the door to the emotional intimacy you so rightly desire." Do you think this is a manipulative use of sex, or a God-ordained function of sex?

- 5) Discuss how sexual promiscuity is affecting the spiritual integrity of men; then suggest ways that wives can help their husbands avoid this trap.

- 6) Were you surprised by Gary's comment that "Many wives simply don't understand how much effort it takes for some men to remain sexually faithful to one wife"? Do you think this is true of your husband? Have you ever thought about how you can make it easier for him? Or thanked him for remaining faithful?

- 7) How well does God think you're helping his son—your husband—walk in sexual holiness?
- 8) How can wives support other wives whose husbands are struggling with pornography? Based on Gary's chapter, what advice would you give a woman who just discovered something on her husband's computer?
- 9) How can wives say "no" to improper sexual demands, while still being generous in regards to pure expressions of physical intimacy?
- 10) Gary ends the chapter by saying that a mutually satisfying sex life knits a man's heart to his wife, helps protect his spiritual integrity, and helps a wife learn how to live in a godly and selfless way. How has God used the sexual relationship in your marriage to teach you how to love?

Chapter Fifteen

Ken and Diana: Affair on the Internet

- 1) To what extent are you and your husband cultivating shared interests? What are some practical ways couples can grow in this area?
- 2) How can wives help husbands take an interest in their hobbies?
- 3) How did Diana's solid faith help her to maintain the right attitude while confronting Ken?
- 4) How can couples guard against Satan taking a natural lull in a relationship and trying to turn that into a permanent break?
- 5) Discuss practical ways that wives can "win their husbands' hearts so that they can influence their souls."
- 6) Are you and husband currently growing together, or are you slowly growing apart? How can you reinforce the former, or reverse the latter?

Chapter Sixteen

John and Catherine: Finding Faith

- 1) Discuss the impact of Jesus' words in Luke 6:32-36, specifically as they relate to a woman married to a nonbeliever or a nominal Christian.

- 2) How can Christian wives who are married to non-believing or spiritually immature husbands follow Paul's directive in Philippians 2:3 to "In humility consider others better than yourselves"?

- 3) How might God use an unsaved spouse to help a Christian wife grow in godliness?

- 4) Do you agree with Catherine that it's possible for a Christian wife married to a nonbeliever to err by going to church functions too often? What might be some other common errors of Christian wives in such marriages?

- 5) How do Christian wives set up their non-believing or spiritually immature husbands for failure, expecting them to do things they just can't do?

- 6) Catherine urges wives, "You must find out what he loves doing and learn to do it with him." How can wives move past the frustration of not sharing their mutual faith expressions, while still being open to sharing other activities?

- 7) What are some of the practical issues—such as money management or time at church—that are likely to be problematic in an unequally yoked marriage? How can a believing wife act and speak in such a way to bring redemption instead of contention?

- 8) How can wives balance patient perseverance—waiting for the right time—with direct sharing of the Gospel?